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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003639

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: KARBALA TRIBES DEMONSTRATE IN FAVOR OF SUPPORT
COUNCILS

REF: A. BAGHDAD 3431
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 2967

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor John Fox for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

This is a PRT Karbala reporting cable.

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Approximately 1,500 tribesmen demonstrated in downtown Karbala on the morning of November 15 to show their support for the Support Councils favored by Prime Minister Maliki and his provincial protege, Governor Aqeel Mahmoud al-Khazali. The demonstration -- apparently organized by the Da'wa Party -- was triggered by recent public comments made by Iraqi President Talabani and Kurdish Autonomous Region President Barzani characterizing the Councils as unconstitutional. Aqeel, whose loyalty to Maliki could win him a high-level position in Baghdad, delivered a speech kicking off the march and permitted the tribesmen to rally near his office. End Summary.

Calling Out the Tribes

[1](#)2. (C) A PRT movement to the Government Center (GC) in downtown Karbala on the morning of November 15 was aborted when the convoy encountered a group of demonstrators marching toward the GC at 1000. The crowd, composed almost entirely of adult men, was well-behaved and seemingly in good cheer. Some of the participants carried banners and signs. The fact that none paid particular attention to the PRT's vehicles -- and a few proffered thumbs-up signs -- suggested that the demonstrators' beef was not with the United States.

[1](#)3. (C) We questioned a number of our contacts about the demonstration and found that one of them, a tribal sheikh, had participated in it. He told us that he had received a phone call the previous evening (November 14) from Muhammad al-Kabi, aka "Abu Dhia," coordinator of Prime Minister Maliki's office in Karbala. Al-Kabi had asked the sheikh to gather as many of his tribesmen as possible and meet at the Education Directorate building at 0900 the following morning. According to our contact, al-Kabi said Governor Aqeel wanted the tribes to demonstrate in favor of the Tribal Support Councils in light of recent public comments by Iraqi President Talabani and Kurdish Autonomous Region Barzani criticizing the Councils as unconstitutional.

A Da'wa Display

[1](#)4. (C) Approximately 1,500 people turned up at the Education Directorate at 0900 on November 15, according to our contact. He brought 23 men from his tribe; some other sheikhs brought more. (Note: As we detailed in ref B para 6, Karbala's Support Council counts some 400 tribal leaders among its 14 branches. End Note.) Aqeel appeared at the Directorate at 0930 and delivered a brief speech excoriating Talabani and Barzani and praising Maliki. Our contact -- who not incidentally will seek a seat on the Provincial Council (PC)

as a member of Da'wa -- stated that the Governor termed the Support Councils as essential to maintaining stability and defending democracy in Iraq.

15. (C) At the conclusion of Aqeel's remarks, the tribesmen were directed to march toward the GC. Although some of the participants brought flags and signs for the occasion, others were provided (by members of Aqeel's staff, according to our contact) with banners backing the Support Councils and taking issue with Barzani's purported comment that Karbala's tribes were opposed to the Councils. Upon reaching the GC, the demonstrators were waved by Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) into the secure compound (something that could not have happened without the Governor's blessing). The gathered at the central parking area and were led by Da'wa members of the PC -- including Mohammad Hamid Hashim, chairman of the security committee -- in several minutes of chants and cheers. The demonstration ended at approximately 1045 and the tribesmen departed the GC. At no time were they allowed into any of the buildings.

Comment

16. (C) Whether or not he was directed by Maliki to orchestrate the demonstration, Aqeel again played the dutiful Da'wa lieutenant. During his struggle to oust Karbala's former ISF commander (MG Ra'ad Shaker Jawdat al-Hasnawi, ref A), the Governor risked his career to prove his loyalty. This time, though the stakes were considerably lower, he once more stepped up to defend his mentor's agenda. Given that all indications are that Aqeel will not seek reelection here,

BAGHDAD 00003639 002 OF 002

we reiterate our belief that his firm grasp of the Prime Minister's coattails could lead him to a job in Baghdad. End Comment.
CROCKER